



## **Character-Development Education and Service Learning**

### ***What is character education and what is the school's role?***

Character education teaches adults and students to understand, engage in, care about, and act on core ethical values such as respect, justice, citizenship, fairness, and responsibility for self and others in school and as part of a larger community.<sup>1</sup>

Because students spend a significant amount of time in school, school is an opportunity to explain and reinforce healthy attitudes and actions that become core values. Character education should be presented comprehensively to include the emotional, intellectual, and moral qualities of a person or group. Multiple opportunities should be made available for students to learn about, discuss, and enact positive social behaviors.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Is character-development education required in Florida Public schools?***

Yes. Since 2004, public schools have been required to offer a secular, character-development program similar to Character First<sup>3</sup> or CHARACTER COUNTS!<sup>4</sup> to students in grades kindergarten through 12. The program must stress the qualities of patriotism, responsibility, citizenship, and kindness; respect for authority, life, liberty, and personal property; honesty; charity; self-control; racial, ethnic, and religious tolerance; and cooperation. Each district school board's character-development curriculum must be approved by the Florida Department of Education (DOE).<sup>5</sup>

### ***Are there any other requirements in K-12 instruction related to character-development education?***

Yes. For example, instruction in public schools must include, but is not limited to, the following:

- ❖ The content, history, and meaning of the Declaration of Independence and United States Constitution.
- ❖ The arguments in support of our republican form of government.
- ❖ The nature and importance of free enterprise in the United States economy.
- ❖ Flag education, including proper flag display and flag salute.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, *Lead and Manage My School*, available at <http://www2.ed.gov/print/admins/lead/character/brochure.html> (last visited May 12, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> The Character First education program trains teachers, parents, and youth workers how to integrate character into daily lessons and activities, how to reinforce positive behaviors, and how to correct inappropriate behaviors in children in elementary, middle, and high school. See <http://www.characterfirst.com/programs/students-families/> (last visited May 12, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> CHARACTER COUNTS! was created to promote the six pillars of character and provides an educational framework for teaching universal values and gives children a foundation for ethical living. Character Counts!, *Frequently Asked Questions*, available at <http://charactercounts.org/overview/faq.html> (last visited May 12, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> Section 1003.42(2)(s), F.S.

- ❖ The history of the Holocaust and African Americans.
- ❖ The study of contributions by Hispanic persons and women to the United States.
- ❖ Comprehensive health education, including the effect of alcoholic beverages and narcotics on the human body and mind.
- ❖ Kindness to animals.
- ❖ The conservation of natural resources.
- ❖ The sacrifices that veterans have made serving the United States of America and promoting democratic values.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, the 2002 Legislature designated the last full week of classes in September as “Celebrate Freedom Week” in Florida’s public schools.<sup>7</sup> Celebrate Freedom Week requires the provision of at least three hours of in-depth instruction during social studies classes on the intent, meaning, and importance of the Declaration of Independence.<sup>8</sup> Students are also required to recite a portion of the Declaration of Independence in order to reaffirm the American ideals of individual liberty. A student must be excused from this recitation upon written request by a parent.<sup>9</sup>

The 2008 Legislature authorized district school boards to designate the first two weeks in October as “Disability History and Awareness Weeks.”<sup>10</sup> Each district school board may provide disability history and awareness instruction to students in kindergarten through grade 12. The instruction may be integrated into the existing school curriculum and its goals should be to achieve better treatment for individuals with disabilities; encourage individuals with disabilities to develop increased self-esteem; and reaffirm the local, state, and federal commitment to the full inclusion in society of, and the equal opportunity for, all individuals with disabilities.<sup>11</sup>

### ***What is Service Learning?***

Service learning is a student-centered, research-based teaching and learning strategy that engages students in meaningful service activities in their communities and schools. Service-learning activities are directly tied to academic curricula, standards, and course, district, or state assessments. These activities foster academic achievement, character development, civic engagement, and career exploration and enable students to apply curriculum content, skills, and behaviors taught in the classroom.<sup>12</sup>

Service learning is provided through the Florida Learn & Serve Program, a federally funded grant program supported by the Corporation for National and Community Service. Florida’s Learn & Serve Program is administered by the Bureau of Family and Community Outreach at DOE, and daily coordination is provided by the University of Florida.<sup>13</sup>

Service-learning projects funded through the Florida Learn & Serve Program are designed to meet specific learning objectives linked to the Florida Sunshine State Standards. Examples of

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<sup>6</sup> Section 1003.42(2), F.S.

<sup>7</sup> Section 1, ch. 2002-213, L.O.F.; s. 1003.421, F.S.

<sup>8</sup> Section 1003.421, F.S.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> Section 1, ch. 2008-156, L.O.F.; s. 1003.4205, F.S.

<sup>11</sup> Section 1003.4205, F.S.

<sup>12</sup> Section 1003.497, F.S.

<sup>13</sup> Florida State University, Florida Learn & Serve, *Who We Are*, available at <http://www.fsu.edu/~flserve/whoweare.html> (last visited May 12, 2010).

service learning include students serving as reading tutors for other students or for adults; serving as museum guides; helping communities prepare for and respond to disasters; publishing histories of their towns, and conducting service projects for and with senior citizens, such as teaching use of computers.<sup>14</sup>

The Florida Learn & Serve Program awards competitive and non-competitive grants to schools and school districts.<sup>15</sup> The table below provides program funding information for 2007-08 through 2009-10 academic years.<sup>16</sup>

<b>Florida Learn &amp; Serve Formula Awards</b>						
<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of Projects</b>	<b>Service Hours</b>	<b>Student Participants</b>	<b>No. of School Districts</b>	<b>Total Award</b>	<b>Average Award</b>
2007-2008	72	1,347,556	27,793	25	\$534,531	\$7,424
2008-2009	63	2,061,250	39,787	24	\$561,887	\$8,919
2009-2010	57	2,152,241	42,994	27	\$584,542	\$10,255

### ***Where can I get additional information?***

#### ***Department of Education***

Bureau of Curriculum and Instruction

Social Studies Education

(850) 245-0423

<http://www.fldoe.org/bii/curriculum/socialstudies/>

Bureau of Family and Community Outreach

(850) 245-0847

<http://www.fldoe.org/family/>

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<sup>14</sup>Florida State University, Florida Learn & Serve, *What is Service Learning?*, available at <http://www.fsu.edu/~flserve/sl/sl.html> (last visited May 12, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Florida State University, Florida Learn & Serve, *Project Descriptions*, available at <http://www.fsu.edu/~flserve/projects/projects.html> (last visited May 13, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*

***Florida House of Representatives***

Education Committee

(850) 488-7451

<http://www.myfloridahouse.gov>